HERALD BANNER

FEATURED TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

Commerce-based charity helps children in Uganda, Central America

By Travis Hairgrove | Herald-Banner Staff Apr 1, 2022

Amigos Internacionales president and CEO Michael E. Ryer pumps water from a newly dug well in Ogul Village in Uganda. Courtesy Photo

For 55 years, volunteers with Commerce-based non-profit Amigos Internacionales have been providing humanitarian aid to people across the world.

Founded in 1967, volunteers with Amigos have traveled far and wide, helping those in need with projects like building and operating medical and dental clinics along the Texas-Mexican border (1967), providing relief to Kurds in Iran (1991), distributing food in North Korea (1997), and helping clean apartments near Ground Zero in New York after the Sept. 11 attacks (2001).

Founder and former Amigos president Dr. John LaNoue, now 86, credits an early experience with a hurricane and his Christian faith as being major inspirations in his life's journey of helping others.

“I lived in Galveston as a kid, and a hurricane came in when I was about 12,” LaNoue said. “My assignment from the Lord was to do His work, and I kept seeing a need.

“I didn’t want to go to North Korea or Iran but the Lord told me to go, so I went and great things came from it,” he added.

Some of the “great things” that happened for the organization recently are its transition into a full-time non-profit in November and being welcomed into the Commerce Chamber of Commerce Tuesday.

Currently, Amigos is placing much of its efforts in Uganda and Guatemala/Belize, building and renovating schools and orphanages in both regions.

“Our big mission now is fighting sex trafficking by helping orphans and abandoned children by giving them access to education,” said current Amigos president and CEO Michael E. Ryer.

Due to war, HIV/AIDS and family neglect, about 2.5 million orphans are estimated to be living in Uganda. In the city of Gulu, Amigos has identified nearly 270 children as being “critically unable to attend school,” and have

been finding sponsors to pay many of the children's school fees, since schooling is not paid for by the Ugandan government.

Amigos has also been drilling wells in Gulu and Ogul Village in Uganda, to improve access to fresh, clean water.

In both Uganda and Central America, the group is also providing food assistance.

Amigos Internacionales president and CEO Michael E. Ryer speaks with members of the Commerce Chamber of Commerce about an orphanage the group plans to build in Uganda.
Travis Hairgrove | Herald-Banner

Recently, Amigos converted a retired school bus into a mobile kitchen and delivered it to Punta Gorda, Belize, where it is to be used to serve meals to school children and those in need around the city. Similarly, the group has also acquired a pontoon boat, which they plan to ship to Guatemala to help with food distribution by traveling the rivers that wind through the Guatemalan Rainforest.

Those who would like to learn more about Amigos Internacionales and keep up with their current efforts can view their blog at www.amigosii.blog or tune in to their podcast, titled “Friends Helping Friends," on Spotify.